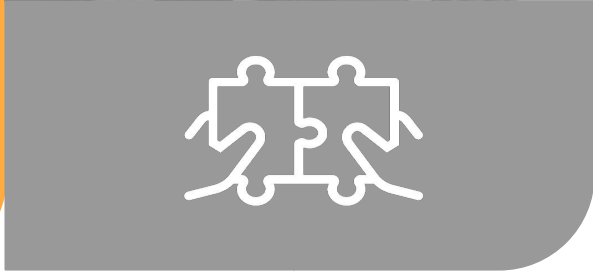




INVOLVING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AS VOLUNTEERS



Volunteering Equality
Rights Action
VERA



Co-funded by
the European Union

Project Number: 101104521

(Revealing European Values In Volunteering in Europe - REVIVE Project No. 101051131)

INVOLVING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AS VOLUNTEERS

Analysis shows that people with disabilities are at a particular risk of social exclusion and difficulties in participation, including in volunteering

29.7% of the EU population aged 16 or more with a disability (activity limitation) was at risk of poverty or social exclusion compared with 18.8% of those with no disability.

People with disabilities are at greater risk of social exclusion, and need stronger avenues to participate in society.

INVOLVING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AS VOLUNTEERS

Why is this an important issue for Volunteering Organisations?

- Engagement from a diverse profile of volunteers can contribute to the quality and impact of an organisation's activities - Each volunteer brings a unique perspective and skills.
- Negative stereotypes can be combated through showcasing people with disabilities as providers, not receivers, of support and action through volunteering.
- Volunteering can alleviate the risk of social exclusion, allowing people with disabilities to implement action on topics they care about - whether that is directly relevant and/or related to their disability or not .

BARRIERS TO VOLUNTEERING

Based on our research through a survey and focus groups, we identified **FOUR groupings** for the different barriers to volunteering reported. These can overlap, interact, and compound one another, and as such should be considered aspects of a whole rather than clear cut categories.

1. Barriers in
Outreach

2. Barriers in
activity/project
design

3. Barriers from
organisational
structures

4. Personal
barriers

BARRIERS TO VOLUNTEERING: 1-2

1. Barriers in outreach

- How organisations reach out to, and communicate with and to people with disabilities
- Method, as well as content, should be considered in terms of accessibility
- Presenting your organisation as inclusive

2. Barriers in activity/project design

- Clarity in terms of needs, responsibilities and roles
- Are the tasks suitable to the volunteer's specific needs and abilities?
- Could an innovative and imaginative solution be found to enable people with disabilities to implement the planned activities?

BARRIERS TO VOLUNTEERING: 3-4

3. Barriers from organisational structures

- Resources and environment to be accessible
- Accessibility for certain disabilities, but not others
- Staff/Volunteers equipped with the appropriate attitudes, knowledge and skills, including of the legal and welfare systems within the country, to empower a disabled volunteer

4. Personal barriers

- More personal, or interpersonal, factors such as social stigma, lack of self-confidence within the volunteer, or lack of support structures within their home life to enable volunteering.
- Media portrayal, societal discussions, as well as past personal experiences, all contribute to building these personal barriers and misconceptions
- Assumption that people with disabilities will volunteer only on disability issues and/or in peer-to-peer support

BARRIERS TO VOLUNTEERING: LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Lack of common, Europe-wide framework for volunteering as a person with disabilities, is another challenge:

-For example, issues around welfare payments, and the limits this places on volunteering, differ between many countries - difficult to create a common understanding or approach

Member

contributions:

Within your country, what is the legal framework for a person with disabilities volunteering? Does a specific framework exist, is it integrated within other policy areas, does the framework enable or complicate participation in volunteering?

1. Outreach



- Content should be presented in an accessible way - readable, clear, appropriately sized font, easy to read colours, and accessible language
- Different ways of sharing information can reach different audiences - physical events, digital materials, audio, visual or written formats for example
- Directly involve people with disabilities, particularly when designing communication and checking accessibility.
- Emphasise inclusive credentials - Make clear that the project is accessible, and that people with disabilities have a place within the organisation
- Volunteers with disabilities included in dissemination material - Video testimonials
- Staff and volunteers have the right knowledge and skills when communicating with potential volunteers with disabilities, to motivate and handle concerns - requires training, an open mind, and a collaborative approach

2. Project/Activity Design



- Variety of roles and tasks within the project for people with different abilities to contribute in different ways.
- Do the roles and tasks need to be more accessible, and if so how?
- Is family volunteering used as a model of participating?
- Individualised approach - Each volunteer can contribute in different ways, has different needs
- Communicate directly with them to learn how best to support and empower the volunteer
- Meaningful, impactful, and relevant tasks for the volunteer - Make use of their abilities to build towards a goal
- Recognition of contributions for the volunteer - Direct validation of skills, project celebrations, evaluation & review of progress throughout
- Support structures: Mentoring, Peer-to-Peer Support, Clear point of contact in the organisation
- Discussions on the structures/adaptations for a specific volunteer, take place involving that volunteer

3. Organisational structures



- Principles of inclusion, accessibility and collaboration should be implemented in the organisation's structures and approach, not just within projects
- Structures should be flexible, able to adapt to specific needs on a case-by-case basis
- A strong code of ethics should include not just non-discrimination, but also active inclusion principles
- Staff need the skills to approach and engage volunteers with disabilities, empathetically and respecting boundaries
- A safe environment which encourages and facilitates communicating abilities and needs
- Physically accessible space
- Material resources to accommodate volunteers with disabilities
- Identify potential gaps - A space which is accessible for people with certain disabilities but not others

4. Personal barriers

The timeline of volunteer engagement should be accessible and inclusive at each stage:

Pre-Volunteering

- First Impressions:
- how you present information - accessible, relatable format
 - what you choose to present - positive role models, inclusive language

Aim: Make a volunteer feel welcome and see potential to grow in your organisation

During the Activities

- Supported by a someone they trust and feel comfortable with
- Clear meaningful tasks, fitting their abilities
- Resources there to meet their needs
- Clear procedure in case of conflict or issues
- Possibility for Family Volunteering

After the Activities

- Skills and contributions are recognised and celebrated
- Enabled to continue volunteering if they so wish
- Discuss other roles and tasks they could have in the organisation i.e. mentor

Case studies: A volunteer perspective

Manuel Corchado González

Barriers faced:

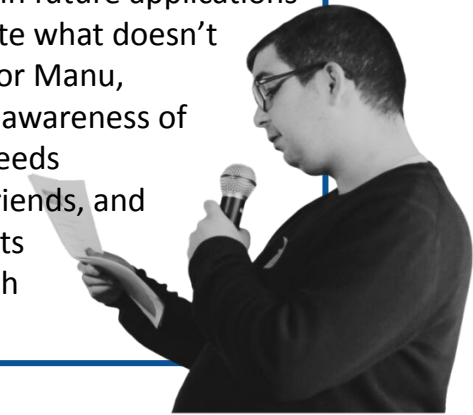
- Organisation's not willing/able to adapt - lack of resources, knowledge, or motivation
- Financial barriers - for the volunteer and the organisations
- Rejections lowering self confidence, losing motivation
- Lacking awareness of own abilities, difficulty communicating them

Recommendations:

- Establish an understanding within the team regarding Manu and his disability
- Offer Remote volunteering - alleviates funding concerns, more flexible
- Involve regularly in meetings - a chance to evaluate tasks & be part of the team
- Showcase in the publications - CEV newsletter & CEV website
- Connect with other, local organisations

Impact and insights:

- Given the chance to explore his strengths and ability - gain confidence and self-awareness
- Equipped with concrete examples and experiences, aiding in future applications
- Evaluate what doesn't work for Manu, better awareness of own needs
- New friends, and contacts through events



Case studies: An organisation's perspective

"Inclusive Volunteering in volunteer-run Museums" Project report

Gold Hill Museum, Dorset, UK:

Barriers highlighted

- Museum itself was largely accessible (lifts between floors, entrance ramp, alternative formats for content)
- Approach to the museum - cobbled streets, steep incline, no railings - Unsafe for mobility or visually disabled people
- Lack of additional formats specifically for Visually impaired people

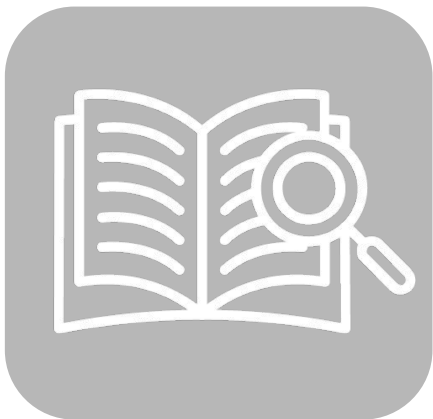
Recommendations:

- Utilise external spaces for volunteer gatherings
- Increase options for remote volunteering
- Cooperating with the local council on improving accessibility approaching the museum
- Existing issue-led roles (Climate Change Volunteer, Community Voices Volunteer) within the museum could develop an accessibility group
- Expand the alternative formats to include accessibility for visual impairments

Insights:

- Importance of a diverse range of roles & methods for volunteers to engage in organisations
- Physical accessibility is crucial, but not always fixable - Remote options can help alleviate
- Remote volunteers should feel part of the community still - Involvement in accessible, volunteer gatherings

Padova Pilot training: Invitation to contribute case studies



- Difficulty finding clear, relatable, materials such as promotional videos which feature volunteers with disabilities - Lack of demonstrable case studies
- Typical focus and pre-conception of volunteering for disabled people, rather than by - Needs to be challenged
- Existing studies usually focused on the very local community - International aspect missing

Padova Pilot training: Invitation to contribute case studies



What would your case study be?

- Barriers faced
- How these were overcome
- The impact volunteering had on:
 - A) Volunteers
 - B) The community
 - C) The organisation

Discussion: Experiences and Challenges

Is there any particular factor which was very strong in motivating you to overcome the barriers?

Have you seen examples of these barriers in your own experience, or know a story of someone who has? How was this handled?

How is volunteering by people with disabilities viewed in your country, or community?

ANNEX 1: INVOLVING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AS VOLUNTEERS

CONCEPTS AND FRAMEWORK

VOLUNTEERING

We can define Volunteering as freely giving one's time to act and carry out activities benefiting society, under a non-for-profit context.

SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Social Exclusion is where people are unable, due to their contexts, engage with, contribute to, and benefit from society fully. Social exclusion can have a huge negative impact on mental health, and physical wellbeing.

ANNEX 1: INVOLVING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AS VOLUNTEERS

CONCEPTS AND FRAMEWORK

BARRIERS TO VOLUNTEERING

The barriers to volunteering refers to the different obstacles in place which make it more difficult for a person with disabilities to participate in volunteering. These barriers may not be intentionally created or maintained, may stem from attitudes, organisational practices, or physical resources, and in many cases a combination of factors builds on the issue, removing them requires a holistic approach.

ANNEX 1: INVOLVING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AS VOLUNTEERS

CONCEPTS AND FRAMEWORK

ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION

When referring to **Accessibility**, and **Inclusion**, we refer to the steps taken and measures in place to ensure that a person with disabilities, or more widely any person in a disadvantaged or minority position, can engage with the actions at the same level as someone who does not have a disability or does not come from a minority group.

NOTE: It's important to keep in mind that social exclusion of people with disabilities cannot be addressed solely by having a legal framework in place, but rather by adopting a holistic approach that emphasises, above all, inclusion and recognition of the value of all people.

ANNEX 2: WHERE TO INTERVENE

It is important to understand the sources and contributing factors towards a barrier, to better develop an effective plan of targeted action.



STRATEGY

Identifying and removing the concrete, tangible barriers to participation in your organisation is one step, however, we must not lose sight of the fact that disability is an individual issue and no two disabled people will have the same needs or abilities. The removal of barriers must be complemented by a general approach and guiding principles for how to involve volunteers with disabilities moving forward.

ANNEX 2: WHERE TO INTERVENE

The framework described above seeks to emphasise that there is no “one size fits all strategy”, with clear concrete actions that all organisations should take, what is more important is that organisations know how to approach the issues. It is an ongoing process to involve and learn about, then meet, the specific needs of different, individual volunteers with disabilities.



- The focus of this framework is on organisations, and how they can be prepared to engage volunteers with disabilities, while not all barriers can be overcome solely at this level, it is one important avenue for contributing to this.
- Discussion point: How can organisations multiply the effect and foster change in other sections of society?

ANNEX 3: SUGGESTED CHALLENGES



Some of the difficulties in performing outreach to potential volunteers with disabilities are as follows:

- Those who are already socially excluded often lack the network to hear about opportunities
- Materials inclusive to one person, may not work given another person's disability
- Apprehensiveness among staff to raise the topic of a person's disability in initial communications
- Lack of existing volunteers with disabilities who can serve as role models